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SUBJECT: EXPANDED NEIGHBORS PREPCON

REF: A. REF A: BAGHDAD 2683
[1](#)B. REF B: AMMAN 3208
[1](#)C. REF C: ANKARA 1735

Classified By: Political Counselor Matthew Tueller for Reasons 1.4d/b

[1](#)1. C) SUMMARY. At the September 9 Expanded Neighbors preparatory conference in Baghdad, participants agreed to hold the next Neighbors Ministerial October 31-November 1 in Istanbul. Arab neighbors greeted the GOI proposal to establish a standing secretariat with skepticism, but with supportive interventions from the U.S., UK, Italy, and UNAMI, Foreign Minister Zebari stated that a summary of discussion on the proposal would be forwarded to Ministers for a decision. The proceedings generally glossed over the more contentious issues and were workman-like and well organized. However, during the opening and closing ceremonies, both Prime Minister Maliki and Foreign Minister Zebari touched on the underlying substance and condemned outside interference in Iraq's internal affairs and affirmed their commitment to the Neighbors process as a means for dealing with this issue. The excellent participation and MFA's success at holding the conference indicates positive progress towards greater regional and international engagement with Iraq. END SUMMARY

Attendance

[1](#)2. (C) Save for Canada, all invitees -- the neighbors (Kuwait, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Bahrain and Egypt), P5, G8 (Italy, Japan and Germany), Arab League, Islamic Conference, and United Nations -- all sent Delegations to the conference, which was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, just outside Baghdad's International Zone. Out-of-town participants were scheduled to arrive on a single charter flight, but at the last moment, the Turks made separate arrangements. The near-simultaneous arrival of two charters led to some confusion and delayed the Turkish delegation's arrival at the venue. This was the only glitch in an otherwise well-run affair which the GOI organized with minimal outside support. While the GOI also nominally took the lead on security matters, the Embassy's RSO section provided substantial behind-the-scenes assistance and MNF-I assets stood-by to respond if required. There were no security incidents during the seven hour long conference.

PM and FM's Opening Statements Allude to the Substance

[1](#)3. (C) Prime Minister Maliki opened the conference by thanking his Arab brothers for coming to Baghdad, but quickly reminded delegations that his government was the legal government of Iraq, elected pursuant to a framework that the Iraqi people had ratified. He renewed the GOI's commitment to the Neighbors process, stressing that dialogue was the preferred means to settle "new and inherited differences", and appealed for non-intervention in the domestic affairs of

his country. Maliki noted that the problems that plague Iraq were also threats to the neighbors and that a stable Iraq was in all the neighbors, interest.

14. (C) Foreign Minister Zebari cited the delegates, attendance in spite of "the difficult current circumstances" as proof of their willingness to work with the Iraqi people during critical times. He appealed to them to make clear commitments to support Iraq benevolently, principally through "active and practical contributions to controlling borders and banning terrorist and criminal infiltrators." He added that "We should say transparently that those who interfere in Iraqi affairs should stop. . .and give the Iraqi people the right to determine their future. . ."

15. (C) Responding in English to a question from the AFP representative during the post-event press conference, Zebari was even more blunt. Neighboring countries, he said were definitely interfering in Iraq,s internal affairs and the GOI wanted to stop that by using the Neighbors process. He added that he had spoken the previous day to the Iranian delegation about their shelling in Kurdistan and emphasized that this type of action would not help bilateral relations and could undermine the atmosphere of confidence between the neighbors. The Iranians held a press conference immediately after Zebari and alleged that the United States supported Kurdish separatists in Iran. (NOTE: When Zebari departed, two-thirds of the audience also left, leaving the Iranian delegation to speak to a largely empty room over the din of the press packing up their equipment. End Note)

Delegations' Opening Statements

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16. (U) All delegations expressed support for Iraqi security and stability and pledged to continue work through the Neighbors process. Some highlights were:

17. (C) Arab League Representative Hisham Yousif called for additional support and training for the Iraqi Army and Iraqi police and demanded the departure of "foreign troops" from Iraq. He added that the Arab League wished to establish an account for the public to make voluntary donations to help displaced Iraqis. He reported that the Arab League had drafted a non-paper with recommendations to assist the Working Groups with substance and logistics.

18. (C) Egypt,s representative Dr. Mohammad Zayid told the conference the Egyptian military was ready to provide training to the Iraqi Army.

19. (C) Iran,s delegation head, Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammed Baqiri, asserted his country was ready to implement Working Group recommendations and added Iran believed it had a role to assist the Iraqi people at all levels, security, political and economic. After mentioning the common border, he stated Iran was closely monitoring the situation in Iraq and condemned the presence of foreign invaders.

110. (C) Ashraf Qazi, head of the United Nations Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) referred to UNSCR 1770 and solicited the delegations, views on how UNAMI can best assist the GOI and the people of Iraq on national reconciliation, internal boundaries and regional dialogue. Qazi explained that UNAMI,s role was to narrow differences on these key issues.

111. (C) French Ambassador Jean Francois Girault also referred to UNSCR 1770 and called for greater EU and UN involvement in Iraq. He stated France,s firm commitment to help Iraq via the Neighbors process.

112. (C) Chinese Ambassador Chen Xiadong noted a clear improvement in Baghdad,s security and noted that GOI efforts

were improving the quality of life in Iraq. He emphasized that the good momentum generated by the Neighbors process should be maintained and closed by saying that Iraqi stability was in China's national interest.

¶13. (C) The head of the Japanese delegation, CDA Owai raised some eyebrows when he noted his country had also been under occupation and had overcome those difficult times with the assistance of the international community. He concluded by saying that Japan hoped Iraq would likewise surmount its current challenges and prosper.

¶14. (C) Russian Federation representative Valery Pospelov, speaking initially in perfect Arabic then switching to English, criticized the Energy Working group for not inviting P5 representatives to their July Istanbul meeting. Calling the decision a mistake that should not be repeated he emphasized that some of the excluded parties possess considerable potential for effective participation in settling the problem of energy shortage in Iraq.

¶15. (C) Ambassador Pat Butenis, heading the U.S. delegation, praised the GOI for successfully organizing the second preparatory conference and called on all Iraq's neighbors to assist in efforts to build a strong, stable Iraq. She urged all Iraq's neighbors to categorically reject violence and to act decisively against those who facilitate or advocate it. (Full text of CDA remarks forwarded to NEA/I.

Working Groups

¶16. (C) The Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister provided a general overview of the results of the Working Groups. (Note: For a more in-depth assessment, see Refs A, B, and C. End Note). Foreign Minister Zebari followed with more substantive comments. Referring to the Energy Working Group, he insisted that the obstacles were "technical and not political" and added that the GOI understood its responsibilities and had resolved outstanding issues with Kuwaiti tanker operators. He told the Jordanian and Syrian delegations that the GOI understood new entry requirements, but hoped that Iraqi citizens would not be subjected to the "whim" of border security personnel at ports of entry. He asked both countries to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate travel, particularly in the case of students. He sidestepped the GOI USD 25 million pledge for Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria, telling the conference that the GOI had not decided what to do about the money.

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¶17. (C) The GOI adroitly managed this issue and pre-empted debate over the venue by indicating in the agenda and during Foreign Minister Zebari's opening statement that Istanbul would be the site for the upcoming ministerials. The Foreign Minister also proposed the October 31-November 1 timeframe. The Turkish delegation formally tabled the motion and the conference adopted it without opposition.

Discussion but No Recommendation on Standing Secretariat

¶18. (C) The proposal to create a Standing Secretariat for the Neighbors process prompted a lively debate that divided the conference along linguistic and geographic lines, which because they closely tracked the seating scheme divided the table in two. Syria led the opposition to the motion, and argued that establishing a permanent body sent the message that Iraq would remain an "open problem." Saudi Arabia

referred to a standing secretariat as a potential bureaucratic monster and suggested that the prepcon was proof that the Neighbors process already functioned smoothly. The Kuwaiti delegation rejected the term secretariat but added it might consider a temporary mechanism to handle logistics and coordination of Neighbors issues. The Kuwaitis made clear that before committing they would require a detailed proposal outlining the new organization,s form and function.

¶19. (C) Newly arrived British Ambassador, Christopher Prentice, argued that a small, professional secretariat was important to coordinate and engage the wider group involved in the Neighbors process. UNAMI Coordinator Qazi said a professional body perhaps imbedded in the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs was necessary to implement decisions made within the Neighbors framework. In a thinly-veiled prod to the GOI, he added the organization could also coordinate actions and propose solutions in cases such as the GOI,s USD 25 million UNHCR pledge. As a further incentive, Qazi also volunteered that UNAMI was ready to allocate resources to the Secretariat. U.S. delegation head Ambassador Butenis urged

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support for the proposal as a mechanism to shoulder the burden of following up on decisions made within the Neighbors process.

¶20. (C) Wrapping up the debate, Zebari told the conference that creating a secretariat did not mean Iraqi problems were permanent and stressed that such a body would relieve his ministry of some of the substantial burden of managing the Neighbors process. He agreed to prepare a non-paper for the Istanbul ministerial summarizing the Conference,s debate but added that the GOI would continue to support the creation of a mechanism to support the Neighbors process.

Off-Camera

¶21. (C) No formal bilaterals occurred, but in an aside, Turkish Deputy Special Envoy for Iraq Murat Ozcelik told CDA and POL/C that the election of Abdullah Gul would create a new attitude in Ankara towards dealings with Iraq in general and a more open approach to Iraqi Kurds in particular.
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